

Mayor Proposes Coordination Of Health Care Services

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Hartford Mayor Eddie A. Perez announced Friday a plan to coordinate the city's health care institutions in a way that, he says, would make it easier for uninsured patients to seek health care.

Called the "Healthy Communities Initiative," the plan calls for the city's hospitals and community health centers to communicate better, have a single computer network that tracks patient care, and offer a universal "Health Care Safety Net Access Card" that would help the uninsured feel that they are part of a health care network.

The program would not offer insurance to the 27,000 that the mayor estimates are uninsured in the city. But supporters say that better coordination among the health care providers that already exist in the city, and who routinely treat the uninsured who come through their doors for care, can improve the quality of care.

"When you can't find the dollars [for insurance], you find it through efficiency. You find it through savings," said Michael Sherman, chief executive officer of Community Health Services, a community health center on Albany Avenue.

Of the 16,000 patients that Community Health Services treats, one in four is uninsured, Sherman said. Right now, there is not a network between Community Health Services and, for example, Hartford Hospital, to see whether those patients are getting duplicate, and costly, care at both sites.

Sherman said having a network would correct that, and the savings realized would help improve health care for and outreach to the uninsured.

The mayor's initiative also calls for having professional medical translators at health care sites as a way to overcome the language barriers that exist between medical providers in the city and many of the uninsured who seek care.

The initiative is just a blueprint for now, but it has the backing of key health and health-

related institutions in the city, including St. Francis Hospital and Medical Center, Hartford Hospital, the Aetna Foundation and the Hispanic Health Council.

The mayor and representatives from those groups said Friday they will seek money from federal and local grants.

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